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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 001487

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SUBJECT: SPANISH DEFMIN ON AFGHANISTAN, DEFENSE SALES

Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 b & d.

11. (C) SUMMARY: Defense Minister Jose Antonio Alonso told the Ambassador on July 25 that Spain's military training teams (OMLTs) will go to Afghanistan in September. He said that NATO's efforts to improve ISAF-OEF coordination are helping but reaffirmed the need to continue to be mindful of the high cost of civilian casualties to overall stability efforts in Afghanistan. Alonso expressed good understanding of the status of the various programs that comprise the US-Spain defense industrial cooperation relationship, but said that his priority at the moment is ensuring that his deployed troops have the proper equipment. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Alonso said that he is pleased that his work with the Embassy over the past year had returned US-Spain defense relations to their normal, cordial state. He told the Ambassador that both sides had left behind a period in which shrillness had sometimes won out over calm reason. Alonso said that, within Spain, he is more concerned about al-Qaeda than about ETA and is particularly focused on threats from North Africa. He said that he would like the US to stay the course in Iraq, but when the Ambassador suggested that it would be useful for him to say so publicly, he demurred, saying that it would be politically impossible. Regarding the upcoming national elections, Alonso said that he expected the Zapatero government to win reelection and noted that both the governing Socialists and opposition Popular Party want to address the disproportionate political power wielded by regionalist and separatist minority parties.

-- AFGHANISTAN --

13. (C) When the Ambassador reminded Alonso of the importance of Spain meeting its own commitment to deploy military training teams to Afghanistan as soon as possible, Alonso said that the teams would deploy in September. He said that he would have liked to send the teams sooner, but said that the deaths of six Spanish troops in Lebanon had forced him to delay going to Parliament for approval of the mission.

14. (C) Despite two recent attacks against joint Spanish-Afghan army patrols in Badghis province -- the first such attacks -- Alonso said that the Regional Command-West (RC-W) remains relatively peaceful compared to the rest of the country and said that Spain intends to keep it that way. He said that Spanish troops responded effectively to the ambushes by Taliban forces, in which there were no known casualties on either side. Regarding Spanish complaints several months ago about communication between ISAF and OEF, Alonso said that ISAF had addressed Spain's issues after much useful discussion at NATO. He said that coordination is much better, adding that everyone must continue to be mindful of the disruptive effect of collateral damage. Spain would

continue to press for the best possible communication at all levels - in the North Atlantic Council, in Kabul, and in the field.

-- DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION --

15. (C) The Ambassador noted that despite his frequent involvement in defense sales issues, he and Alonso had not talked much at their level about the issues. He said that given the importance of defense industrial cooperation to both sides, they should review the key programs. Alonso thanked the Embassy for helping to resolve a paperwork dispute that was holding up a \$1.2 billion program to build frigates for the Norwegian navy. He said that Spain was pleased to have just signed a deal to sell similar frigates to Australia. Alonso said that he credits excellent cooperation between Lockheed Martin and Spanish shipbuilder Navantia as the factor that convinced Australia.

16. (C) Regarding the recent news that a Spain-US consortium had lost out to an Italy-US consortium for the Joint Cargo Aircraft contract, the Ambassador assured Alonso that the decision was technical rather than political. Alonso said that he understood the Spanish bid to be the better of the two, and hoped that the Defense Department would give a fair review to the contract award when it considered Raytheon's appeal. The Ambassador reminded Alonso that the USG continues to buy Spanish planes through the Coast Guard's Deepwater program.

17. (C) The Ambassador told Alonso that USAF BG Davis had recently come to Madrid to brief the Spanish Air Force and Navy chiefs about the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program. He said that the service chiefs were convinced that the JSF offered technology far superior to the Eurofighter. Alonso

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said that he needs to take a close look at the budget to ensure that MOD was spending its limited funds on the right programs. He noted that ensuring sufficient support for ongoing operations is his priority.

-- COMMENT --

18. (C) Alonso continues to lead by example, using a calm, productive tone with the USG. He and his top deputies cannot always give us what we want, but they show that they value a positive relationship with the US. Alonso demonstrates a genuine interest in global strategic issues, but spends much of his time on shorter term domestic political realities because of the intense politicization of military issues in Spain. For example, his comment about ensuring adequate support for his deployed troops is related to the bashing that he took from the opposition Popular Party after Spanish troops were killed in Lebanon while riding in vehicles that lacked frequency inhibitors.
AGUIRRE